

# Introduction

*"We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."*  
Albert Einstein

The LDC Design Team created an instructional system that is now known as "LDC". This document establishes the technical specifications for this system. We call these specifications "The LDC Framework". The audience is current LDC project leaders and potential LDC partners interested in designing LDC modules.

Why the need for standardization? Vicki Phillips said it best when she referred to LDC as an approach that gives everyone a common "chassis" to build on. So in the end you have a system, rather than "a thousand flowers blooming". In that spirit, we also think of LDC as a common "language"—in the broadest sense—useful for capturing and sharing instructional expertise.

Our goal in designing this framework has been to take a minimalist approach, holding the system together with a lean model while being clear enough to give users a framework for building out their own instructional choices. We are ever mindful of areas where we might inadvertently block quality instruction and are constantly on the lookout for any necessary adjustments.

The logic model built into the LDC module system is:

- **Section 1: What task? What tasks set clear, rigorous goals for learning?**  
A quality teaching task is the beginning point for quality instruction. Teaching tasks set the stage for learning challenging content and literacy skills necessary in academic coursework as well as in the world at large. A quality teaching task is worth teaching because it is relevant to the curriculum or discipline and aligned to learning goals. The LDC Framework has hard-wired a sub-set of literacy standards into the task templates. So, when you complete a teaching task, you "automatically" create alignment to Common Core State Standards learning goals. A quality teaching task is doable in that it is paced for two to three weeks focusing on one or more texts that involve students in addressing an interesting question, issue, or topic as they read and write. Finally, a quality teaching task creates a literate environment for students to engage in critical thinking, employing a range of literacy practices and skills including discussion, speaking, and listening.  
  
**Section 2: What skills? What skills do students need to succeed on the teaching task?**  
In order for students to be successful on the teaching task, practitioners must be clear on the reading, writing, and other literacy skills students must develop. These skills are identified by "back-mapping" from the requirements of the teaching task. Module developers cluster these skills into groupings that make sense for the teaching task. All LDC modules must involve some form of reading and writing skills within clusters. Different lists of skills that will emerge from various LDC partners will support researchers in identifying areas of agreement on essential skills.
- **Section 3. What Instruction? How will you teach students to succeed on the teaching task?**  
This section specifies the instructional system teachers employ to teach the skills identified in Section 2 and to assist students in succeeding on the teaching task identified in Section 1. Instruction is organized around teacher-ready "mini-tasks" or short classroom assignments that teach the skills necessary to complete the teaching task. . These mini-tasks are scored and measurable; as such they create a formative engine for monitoring what students are learning—or not—and feed into the instructional choices teachers make as they teach. They also provide opportunity for teachers to correct or "repair" any misunderstandings or skill weaknesses students may have. Instructional strategies and a pacing guide are also noted. All together, these features in the LDC system make up what is called an "instructional ladder."
- **Section 4-What Results? How good is good enough?**  
Measuring student results is a hallmark of good instruction. It also provides a way for teachers to calibrate rigor levels so they have common understandings of expectations. By sharing classroom sets of student work, teachers can have robust professional learning opportunities to examine their own practice and how

they contributed to those results. This section prompts the sharing of exemplary student work samples to support scoring rubrics and for calibrating expectations.

The LDC Framework consists of:

**LDC Template Tasks** which provide LDC colleagues with a set of partially-built task templates aligned to the common core;

**LDC Module Specifications** which spell out requirements and options for Literacy Design Collaborative partners to follow when designing LDC Modules and using LDC template tasks;

**LDC Terminology** which spells out the required terms and definitions used by LDC; and

**LDC Jurying System** spells out the system that the collaborative will use to give feedback on the quality of LDC tasks and modules created by teachers and others. This system was under development during the 2011-12 school year. A working system will be shared in January 2012.

Ultimately, the LDC framework is pragmatic in its purpose: literacy skills are so important in the lives of students that they must be intentionally and frequently taught. If students are to acquire and refine their ability to use language as readers, writers, and speakers to achieve their personal and professional goals, literacy instruction must become the staple of all instruction. LDC aims to assist teachers in the core disciplines and beyond by meeting them part way in the effort to deliver quality literacy instruction in classrooms. It is teachers and our partners who bring their expertise to the crafting of a completed teaching task and its module. Accordingly, LDC views you as co-designers in transforming LDC templates into a quality teaching tasks and modules.

## Reading on Science, Social Studies Teachers' Agendas

To meet the expectations of the common standards, Kentucky's science and social studies teachers are incorporating language arts into their classes

By Catherine Gewertz

Taylor Mill, Ky.

Beth Fahlbush is moving from desk to desk, helping her high school juniors sharpen their essays. They're zeroing in on their lead paragraphs and hunting for the evidence they must marshal to build the bodies of their essays.

"If the evidence does not directly relate to your thesis, cut it out," Ms. Fahlbush tells one girl, who listens as she twists a strand of hair in her fingers. "Remember," the teacher says to a tall boy slouched in a nearby seat, "you are writing an argumentative essay. So you need to defend each of your points."

The teenagers in Room 122 of Scott High School, here in northern Kentucky, are not in English class. They're in U.S. history. And what's happening represents a leading edge of key changes that are taking shape as states and districts put the Common Core State Standards in English/language arts into practice.

The seven middle and high schools here in Kenton County are among the first in the country to pilot a new approach to the discipline. It targets the most pivotal ideas in the standards, which demand that students become strong readers not only of fiction but of informational texts, and that they become writers able to wield research, analysis, and argumentation skills as powerful tools. Reflecting the standards themselves, the approach involves teachers of all subjects in teaching literacy skills pertinent to their disciplines.

### Shaping a Strategy

Kenton County's version is guided by a set of teaching tools that were developed by the **Literacy Design Collaborative**, a loosely knit group of consultants working with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which has poured tens of millions in grants into supporting the common standards. More than 3,500 teachers in 50 districts in eight states, including Kentucky, are using the foundation's grants—and guidance—to try out the tools.

The centerpiece of the English/language arts toolkit is a **collection of "template tasks."** These short, fill-in-the-blank prompts are designed to open doors to instructional tasks that demand reading, writing, and analysis, and can be customized to each teacher's subject matter. They are structured to address three types of writing—argumentation, explanatory, and narrative—and nine types of cognitive process, such as synthesis, comparison, and evaluation.

Science teachers created their version of the instructional task by asking students to consider whether uranium use and nuclear fission are the best methods of producing energy in light of concerns about global warming. It was built into a larger instructional module for chemistry classes, aimed at building argumentation skills as students explore nuclear energy. The prompt instructs students to read scientific sources supplied by their teacher and write a report addressing that question, supporting their positions with evidence from the texts and acknowledging competing points of view, with examples of past or current events to illustrate and clarify their positions.

### A Slim Design

Kenton County officials say the templates' minimalist structure is deceptive.

"They seem much simpler than they are," said Barb Martin, who oversees the work as the 14,000-student district's assistant superintendent for academic and student support. "How you fill in those blanks is crucial and takes a lot of careful thought. Unwise choices can sink the whole thing.

"This, to me, is the doorway to getting our kids to interact with text. They really weren't. They were being read to, and given notes, and summarizing what they heard," she said.

Weaving together content, reading, and writing marks a sharp departure from common practice, in which science and social studies teachers focus exclusively on content, Mr. McCormick said.

"We've found the structure of the [design collaborative] tools to be groundbreaking, because the content is forward at the same time as the literacy skills," he said.

Some Kenton County teachers weren't the biggest fans of the strategy when it was introduced in 2010.

Michelle Buroker, the Scott High School chemistry teacher who designed the nuclear-energy module, said that when science teachers got their first glimpse of it, they suspected it would be tough to find readings that are engaging, age-appropriate, content-rich, and full of writing-assignment potential.

"We thought we wouldn't be able to make it fit authentically into our content, that it would just make it harder for us to get through our [text]book," she said. "But now that we are finding those resources, I see that it's a good thing to have in my bag of tricks.

"It doesn't work for everything," she continued. "But when I can link [chemistry] to something real, like electromagnetic radiation from cellphones, or nuclear energy, the kids see the relevance of what they're learning, and there is more buy-in. They learn the content better."

Ms. Fahlbush, the social studies teacher, said it "was definitely foreign at first" to be explicitly teaching reading and writing strategies to her students.

"We had that mentality that you're not an English teacher, you're a social studies teacher, so that needs to be taken care of in another class," she said. "When I first started doing it, it definitely did take time away from my content, and I didn't like it.

"But now that I'm in the second year, I see that I am teaching the content, just doing it through the writing assignments. The social studies teachers talk about it; we all see our students writing better, and we can see from their open-ended and constructed responses that they are understanding the concepts better."

### **Drawing Students In**

The emphasis on analysis and argumentation has paid off with student writing that is not only more informed, but more engaged, said Roger Stainforth, a Dixie Heights High School social studies teacher.

His students got "really fired up" by a recent writing prompt asking them to analyze and take a position on how the search-and-seizure provisions of the U.S. Constitution's Fourth Amendment apply to students in school, Mr. Stainforth said.

"Kids this age want to be heard," he said. "They haven't known how to argue. But man, once they figure it out, they get into it! I used to get a few graphs from them, but now I get pages."

Students who have faced the writing prompts notice a difference between them and the kinds of assignments they got before their district began using the template tasks.

"We spent like two weeks researching stuff, and we had to justify everything we said. I'm a pretty good writer, and I can usually just get by, writing, you know, whatever," he said with a sheepish laugh. "But I actually had to think through things. When I was done, I considered it an accomplishment. It was interesting to be challenged in school."

The Kentucky education department is working to spread the template-task idea to districts statewide through a **statewide group of networks** it built as a vehicle to scale up common-standards implementation.

"The leadership networks are built on the premise of building the capacity of every single district to implement the standards in the context of highly effective teaching, learning, and assessment practices," said Karen Kidwell, who oversees the networks for the state education department.

"We focus on the questions, 'What is the intent of each standard, and how do you translate those into effective instruction and generate acceptable evidence of student mastery?' "